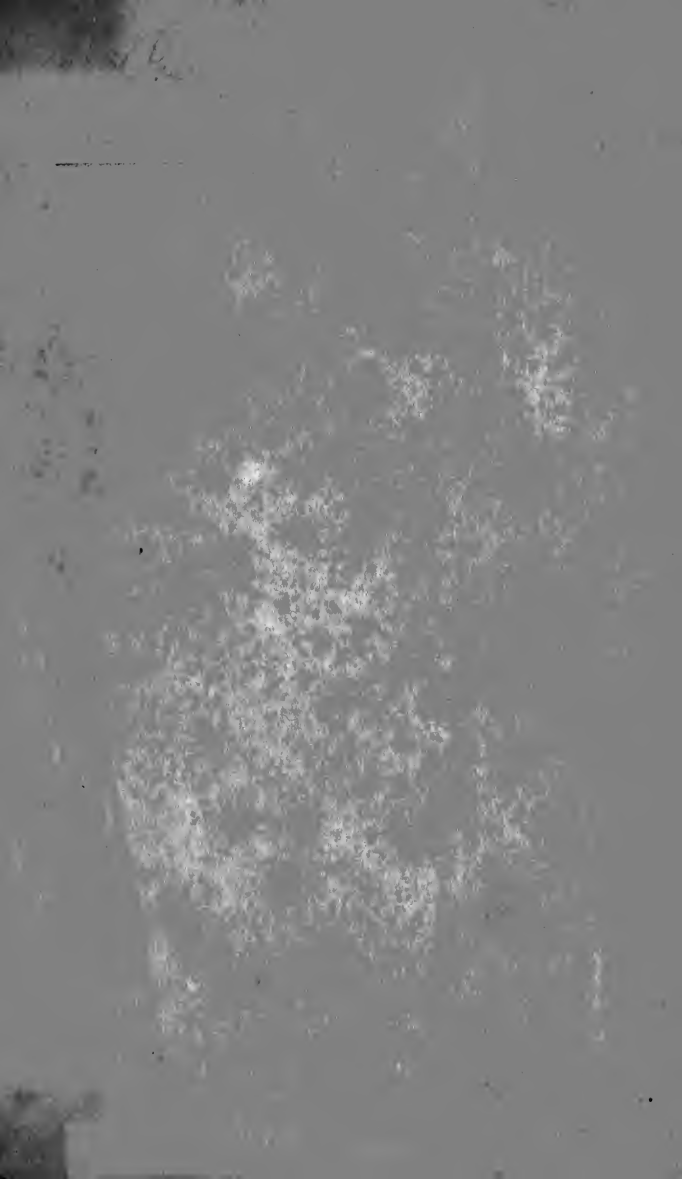




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THE

LIFE OF ELIJAH.

Hooker, Mrs. Mary Ann (Brown)

WRITTEN FOR THE AMERICAN SUNDAY-SCHOOL UNION, AND
REVISED BY THE COMMITTEE OF PUBLICATION.

Philadelphia:

AMERICAN SUNDAY-SCHOOL UNION,
NO. 146 CHESTNUT STREET.

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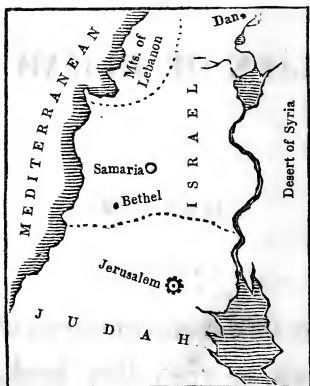
THE LIFE OF ELIJAH.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION.

I wish to tell the children who are beginning to read this book, some things which it will be necessary for them to know, in order to understand the story of Elijah.

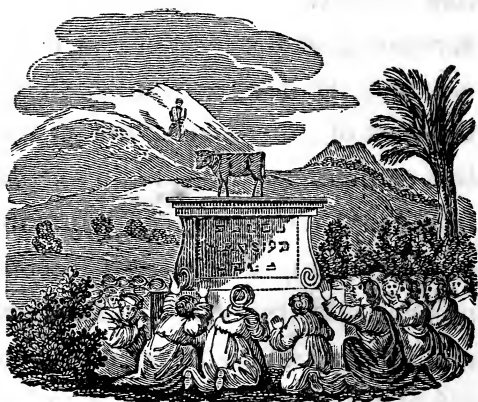
Ahab, the son of Omri, became king over Israel about three thousand and eighty-six years after the creation of the world, and nine hundred and eighteen years before the birth of Christ. He reigned over a beautiful country, which extended



from the mountains of Lebanon on the north to the kingdom of Judah on the south, and from the Mediterranean on the west to the desert of Syria on the east.

This kingdom had been separated from the kingdom of Judah immediately after the death of Solomon. Jeroboam, who was the first king of Israel after the separation, did not

like to have his subjects go up to Jerusalem, at the feast of the passover, and the feast of pentecost, and the feast of tabernacles, though God had commanded them to do so. He feared that, if they went so frequently to Jerusalem, they would become reconciled to their brethren, the Jews, and finally unite with them into one kingdom, under the kings of Judah. These kings of Judah were descendants of David, who had been a very popular king, and the people would be in more danger of liking them on that account. So Jeroboam wickedly made two golden calves, and set one up in Bethel, and the other in Dan, for the people to worship. The priests and Levites who were



in the cities of Israel, would not join in this idolatry. They left the land of Israel and went to Judah, where they could worship at the temple of God. Thus, the Israelites were deprived of their usual teachers, and tempted to idolatry by their king. But many prophets lived among them, who, from time to time, taught

them their duty, and delivered messages to them from God. All the kings who reigned over Israel were very wicked, but Ahab was worse than any of the others. He set up other idols besides the golden calves, and worshipped them constantly, without attempting to conceal it, or being in the least ashamed of it. He married Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal, king of Tyre. She was aunt to Queen Dido, who built the city of Carthage.

Ahab reigned twenty-one years. He was a weak king, and was entirely governed by his wife, who was devoted to the idolatrous religion of her father, and was full of pride and cruelty. Ahab and Jezebel built a

temple for Baal, in Samaria, and set up an image of Baal, and consecrated a grove to the worship of the god of the Phenicians. They supported many prophets or priests of Baal, and also many priests of Astarte, a Phenician goddess. The Israelites forgot the law which had been given to their fathers on Mount Sinai, and were fast becoming a nation of idolaters.

CHAPTER II.

ELIJAH AT THE BROOK CHERITH.

Elijah standing before Ahab—His message—God speaks to Elijah—Elijah goes to the brook Cherith—Description of the country round the brook—Elijah is hungry—He is fed by ravens—Meaning of the name Elijah—How Elijah spent his time here—Men often ungrateful—Elijah a reformer—The brook dries up.

A MAN was standing before King Ahab. He was dressed in a coarse garment, made of camel's hair, called sackcloth. His manner was dignified and commanding, and his countenance serious and somewhat stern. He had brought a message from God.

The king, and his attendants, and the Israelites who looked on, knew it to be the prophet Elijah.



He had been commanded by God to pronounce sentence against Ahab and the whole nation of Israel for their wickedness.

He said to the king, "As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word."

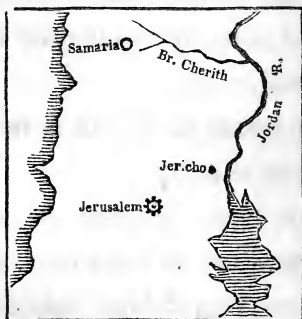
The prophet did not fear the angry looks of the king. The people were astonished at Elijah's boldness, and distressed at the terrible sentence which he had uttered in the name of God.

No rain for years ! The fields of grain would wither, there would be no food for man, and the cattle would die of thirst.

A voice spoke to Elijah, but it was heard by no others. It was not the voice of a man. It was the Spirit of God speaking to the mind of Elijah, and saying, "Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is, before Jordan. And it shall be that thou shalt drink of the brook; and I

have commanded the ravens to feed thee there."

Elijah obeyed. He went to a solitary place on the banks of the brook Cherith, which empties into the river Jordan, north-east of Jericho. He looked around. Steep,



rugged mountains were near, not like the beautifully green, wooded mountains of America, but rocky and bare. There were no fields of corn, or olive

yards, or vineyards to be seen. The trees of the valley spread their branches over his head, and gave him a pleasant shade, but they bore no fruit. And if a few berries grew among the vines that clambered over the rocks, they were not sufficient to support a strong man like Elijah. He can drink of the waters of the brook, but how shall he find food in this desolate place? God will take care of him.

Elijah slept all night by the side of the brook. He awoke in the morning. The brook ran by him with a murmuring sound. The sun shone brightly in the heavens, but there was no dew upon the grass and wild flowers. Elijah was hungry.

Some birds are flying at a distance. They come near to Elijah, fanning the air with their wings. They are large, and of a glossy



blackness. They have bread and meat in their beaks. They place it near to Elijah, and fly away.

These birds are ravens

But ravens are fond of flesh. They are hungry birds, and often cannot get as much as they want. If they had meat, why did they give it to Elijah? God sent them.

But ravens do not often come so near to a man. They are afraid of snares, and guns, and arrows. They are unsocial birds, and build their nests in the highest trees. Why did they not fear to approach the prophet? God gave them courage and confidence in Elijah.

Elijah ate his breakfast, and thanked God. All day long he remained by the brook Cherith, or wandered alone among the hills. At night the ravens brought him bread and meat. Again he slept by the side of the

brook, and again God sent him food by his messengers, the ravens.

Elijah had come to this solitary place in obedience to the commands of God. He knew that he could not there obtain food in any ordinary way. But he trusted in God. If you do your duty, God will provide for you.

Elijah's confidence in God was great, for he knew that he is able to do what he has promised. Almost all the Hebrew names have some meaning, and the meaning of the name of Elijah was "The Lord, my God, is He."

Elijah spent about a year in this lonely spot, drinking of the waters of the brook, and receiving his food

from the birds of the air. In the day time, the sun shone with a scorching heat upon the earth; for there were no mists nor vapours to soften its beams. Not a cloud was to be seen, and the heavens glowed like a furnace. Elijah might find a cooling shade among the willows that bordered the brook, or perhaps in the caves that abound in that hilly country. But he was without companions, and probably without books. How did he employ his time?

Though men were not near him, God was near. He prayed to God when the day dawned, and when the sun was high in the heavens, and when the moon shone brightly on his head.

When the ravens brought him food, he thought of the goodness and watchful care of God.

Men sometimes sow grain upon their fields, and see it growing from day to day. When it is ripe they cut it down, and gather it into their barns; but they often forget that God made it grow, that they might not perish with hunger.

They clothe themselves warmly with the fleeces of their sheep, but they too often forget that God caused the wool to grow, that they might not suffer from the cold.

They sit down to tables loaded with dainties. Their children are around them with smiling faces. They are healthy and happy. But

they do not remember who gives them these blessings. They think they have obtained them by their own labour.

Elijah was not so ungrateful. His heart was full of love and gratitude to God. He wished to obey and serve him as long as he lived.

Elijah thought much of his countrymen, the Israelites. They had a wicked king, who tempted them to idolatry. They had followed his evil example, and had provoked God with their sins, and he had begun to punish them with a terrible drought. Yet they were perhaps at that moment bowing down before the golden calves at Bethel and Dan, or seeking relief from the image of

Baal, which Ahab had set up in Samaria.

Elijah was raised up to be a reformer in Israel. A reformer should be a great and good man. He needs courage, and perseverance, and faith in God, and great love to the people, whom he is trying to reform, and a constant hatred of every kind of wickedness. Elijah had these qualities, and they were much strengthened and improved while he prayed and meditated by the side of the brook Cherith.

Months passed away, and no rain nor dew had fallen upon the earth. The brook grew narrower and narrower. The grass and rushes that lined its banks began to wither.

The pebbles and roots of trees which had been washed by it were left dry and bare. It ceased to run, but water stood in the deep hollows. At last it was dried up.

CHAPTER III.

ELIJAH AT ZAREPHATH.

Elijah commanded to go to Zarephath—Why God sent him thither—Situation of Zarephath—Widow of Zarephath and her son—Elijah asks her for bread—The meal and oil that did not fail—How bread was made among the Israelites.

ELIJAH waited patiently till God should direct him to leave his retirement, though the waters of the brook were fast disappearing, and he had no other means of quenching his thirst. At last the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, "Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there; behold I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee."

God meant to try the faith of Elijah by this command, as he had done before when he promised to send him food by the ravens. It might seem to the prophet that a poor widow, in those times of distress and famine, would find it difficult enough to take care of her own family.

But if he was sent to a widow to be supported, why was he not sent to some of the widows of Israel? Why was he directed to a heathen country, where the people were worshippers of Baal?

Elijah did not know. But he knew there are wise and good reasons for all that God does. He did not hesitate to obey him.

Elijah had told king Ahab that there would be no rain upon the land of Israel, till he returned and prayed for it, and predicted it. The Israelites were suffering dreadfully from famine, as the springs of water were dried up, and the fruits of the earth blasted. Ahab was searching everywhere for Elijah, hoping to persuade or force him to pray to God for rain: It was necessary, therefore, for Elijah to conceal himself, for the Israelites had not yet repented of their idolatry, and God did not intend to send rain upon the earth for a long time to come.

Elijah went to the city of Zarephath, which is between Tyre and Sidon, on the coast of the Mediter-



ranean sea and the country of Phœnicia. In going to that place from the brook Cherith, he passed through nearly the whole kingdom of Israel from south-east to north-west. Yet he was not discovered by Ahab, or any of his friends. He entered the country of Phœnicia, which is a narrow strip of land, shut in between the mountains of Lebanon on the

east, and the Mediterranean sea on the west. He drew near to the city of Zarephath. It was surrounded by walls. As he approached the gate, he saw a poor woman gather-



ing sticks. God, in some way, informed him that she was the person who was to provide him food during the continuance of the famine. Eli

jah called to her and said, "Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink." She cheerfully turned away to comply with his request, but Elijah then asked her to bring him also a morsel of bread. This seemed out of her power. She replied, "As the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but a handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruise: and behold, I am gathering two sticks that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it and die."

The famine which so much distressed the Israelites had extended into Phœnicia. The poor woman was going to prepare her last meal for herself and a beloved child; ex-

pecting, after they had eaten it, to die of hunger. Elijah must have looked upon her with pity, yet he said, "Fear not; go and do as thou hast said; but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son. For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, the barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth." This was a hard command. The woman was probably weak and faint from the scarcity of food. She felt the pangs of hunger, which cause very great suffering. She thought how dreadful it would be to starve to death. She remembered her help

less child, who was waiting at home for bread. Could she take the last morsel from him, and give it to a stranger ?



She looked at Elijah. It was plain that he was a holy man, who was wearied with his journey, and exhausted by fasting. He had no friends to give him food. He was a

servant of the God of the Hebrews, of whom she had heard, and who, she knew, had performed many wonderful miracles. Elijah had promised in his name that she should be rewarded if she supplied his wants. She invited him to her house, and prepared for him bread; and afterwards baked more for herself and her son.

This woman lived in a heathen country, but she had strong faith in the God of Israel.

Every day the widow went to prepare bread for her family and the prophet; and still there was a handful of meal in the barrel, and a little oil in the cruse or bottle; so that all of them ate and were satisfied. The

oil was olive oil, which is used in those countries instead of butter. The bread was made into thin cakes, and baked in the ashes, or on flat pieces of iron laid upon the coals.

There was no more distress from hunger in the house of the widow of Zarephath, for God did not suffer her provisions to fail. A blessing was upon her and upon all her family for her kindness to Elijah. God has commanded us to show hospitality to strangers.

CHAPTER IV.

DESCRIPTION OF MOUNT LEBANON

Four ranges of peaks—Description of the highest range—Of the second range—Cedars of Lebanon—Cultivated spots—Cold flowing waters of Lebanon—Third range—Lowest range—Vineyards and orchards.

ELIJAH remained more than two years at Zarephath. It was a pleasant spot. The sea was spread out before it, and the mountains of Lebanon rose, like a high wall, behind. As Mount Carmel was admired for its beauty, the mountains of Lebanon were celebrated by all the Hebrew poets for their grandeur and sublimity. They extend many miles

from north to south, and consist of four ranges of peaks, rising one above another. Snow falls frequently in winter upon the highest peaks; and, as in places far above the earth, the air is too thin to diffuse the rays of the sun, so as to produce warmth, it lies there the greater part of the year. The tops of these mountains were some of them rounded, and some of them shooting up into sharp pinnacles. Covered with snow and ice, they formed an outline of the most dazzling whiteness against the clear blue sky. To seamen who were approaching the shore from a distance, they appeared like fleecy clouds, whose edges were tinged by the sun with a silvery light. Farther

down, around the borders of the snow, where it melts, and runs in many streams down the mountain, it was fringed by a thicket of flowering shrubs of the most brilliant colours.

But the range of peaks next below these were more verdant and beautiful than I can describe. Large forests of cedars, of a stately and majestic kind, grew in different parts of the mountain. The oldest of these trees were immensely large. Some which now remain there measure from thirty-five to forty feet around the trunk. At a considerable distance above the ground, they sent out wide spreading, horizontal branches. The branches gradually grew small

er as they approached the top, where they terminated in a spire, which gave to the tree the shape of a pyramid.

The regular figures and beautiful proportions of the cedars, covered with leaves which resembled those of the rosemary, and were always green, caused them to be much admired. Their seeds were contained in large scaly cones of a reddish brown colour, which hung thickly among the branches, so that the trees appeared as if loaded with fruit. A pure, transparent, white gum was distilled from the branches and cones, which was soft and fragrant as the balsam of Mecca. Every part of these trees, the wood, the leaves.

and the fruit, sent out an aromatic perfume, making the cedar groves so pleasant and fragrant that it was delightful to walk in them. It was, probably, from this that the smell of Lebanon was spoken of by several of the writers in the Bible.

The cedar wood was preferred for building, because it was more durable, and fragrant, and beautiful than any other kind. The Tyrians made it into masts for their ships; and Hiram, a former king of Tyre, had cut down many of the trees, and sent them to king Solomon, to be used in building the temple at Jerusalem. These trees were the glory of Lebanon. When the Hebrew writers wished to describe any thing grand,

or magnificent, or powerful, they often compared it to the cedars of Lebanon.

But, besides these, there were a multitude of other trees scattered about upon the mountains. Clumps of fir trees rose gracefully over precipices of white limestone, and waved their silvery foliage in the clear sunlight; the tall pines shook their feathery tufts in the evening breeze, and the mournful cypress spread its thick shade over the brook. So many evergreens gave a solemn and majestic air to the scenery; yet in other places there were gardens, and orchards, and pastures for flocks

In open spots on the mountain you might look far out upon the sea,

where ships were coming from different ports on the Mediterranean to Tyre, then the most commercial city in the world.

It was beautiful to see the streams which were formed by the melting of the snows above : how they rushed in foaming torrents along the steep slopes of the mountain. But when they reached a level spot, they wound silently among the trees, reflecting from their clear, smooth surface the overhanging boughs, and the shrubs and flowers that grew on their banks. Then they came suddenly into the light, and poured their transparent sheets of water over the precipices with a thundering sound ; or fell in cascades from rock to rock,

scattering their white foam upon the green turf. These were the cold flowing waters of Lebanon. Cooled by the snow and ice which they brought down from above, they offered a refreshing drink to the inhabitants of the warm countries around. The cattle and sheep came there to quench their thirst; and so did the wild goats of the mountain, and the beautiful gazelle, with its dark and brilliant eyes.

The range of peaks next below these was very different. It was covered with sharp flinty rocks and a thin dry soil, which bore only briars and thorns. It looked like a belt of barrenness, stretching along the verdure of the mountain.

The lowest peaks, where the mountains slope down into the plain, were usually covered with vineyards, fields of grain, and plantations of figs and melons. The vines yielded large clusters of purple grapes three times in a year. The wine which was made from them was of the richest flavour, and much celebrated in that country. The soil produced in abundance every thing that is delightful to the eye and pleasant to the taste. The orchards were filled with fruit, and the earth carpeted with flowers.

I have described the mountains of Lebanon as they appeared in fruitful seasons when God sent rain upon the earth ; but when Elijah

was in the neighbourhood, they must have been much parched by the drought. Yet we may suppose that the prophet often walked upon the mountain when he wished to be alone, since the air was much cooler than at Zarephath, and it was easier to be quiet and retired than in the valley below.

CHAPTER V.

ELIJAH RESTORES THE WIDOW'S SON
TO LIFE.

Death of the widow's son—Description of the death of a child—Grief of the widow of Zarephath—Elijah prays to God over the child's body—God hears his prayer—The child revives—Elijah gives him to his mother—Reflection.

ONE day the little son of the widow of Zarephath was taken ill. His mother nursed him and watched over him, but he grew worse and worse. He was pale and languid, and much distressed. His mother took him into her arms, and supported his head against her bosom. His breath grew short and interrupt-

ed; at last it stopped. The blood no longer flowed in his veins and arteries; his pulse and heart ceased to beat. He was dead.

I saw a young child whose countenance beamed with life and intelligence. Her eyes were soft and brilliant; her cheeks bloomed like the rose; her motions were sprightly and active. Her tongue was full of joyous prattle, and her mind thirsted after knowledge. She loved to talk of God, her Maker and her Father, and gazed with delight upon his works,—from the bright star and purple cloud of evening, to the little flower by the way side.

In a few days she was stretched weak and helpless on a pillow. Her

cheeks were pale like the snowdrop, her breathing short and hard, and her voice feeble. She looked at her friends with a patient yet mournful expression, for her sufferings were great. She spoke in whispers of Jesus Christ, her Saviour, and of her wish to live with God, and good people in heaven.

A few days more, and her lifeless body was laid in a little coffin, and the coffin was let down into a narrow grave. The grave was then filled with earth, and green turf was spread over it. Her parents turned sorrowfully away, and we saw her no more.

Have you seen a dear child lying cold and pale, and gasping for

breath, with the damps of death upon its face? Was it your little brother or sister? Then you felt painful sorrow, and the tears ran down your cheeks. If you grieved thus, how do you think the widow of Zarephath felt when she looked upon the lifeless body of her only son?

Her heart swelled as though it would burst. A heavy burden seemed to weigh her down, and her thoughts were wild and confused. Her husband lay in the grave, and now her child, her last comforter, was gone. He was her companion, and she had hoped that he would support and take care of her when she should be old

She looked up, and saw Elijah standing before her. In her agony she thought that the prophet might have prayed to God to send this judgment upon her as a punishment of her sins. She said, "What have I to do with thee, Oh thou man of God? Art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son."

Elijah pitied her distress. He said to her, "Give me thy son." He took the child out of her arms, and carried him up to his own chamber, and laid him upon the bed. He prayed earnestly to God, and said, "O Lord, my God, hast thou also brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son?" Then



he stretched himself three times upon the child, as though he would have given him life from his own body ; praying at the same time, “O Lord, my God, I pray thee, let this child’s soul come into him again.”

The Lord heard the prayer of Elijah. The soul of the child, which had left his body, returned to it again. He breathed, opened his

eyes, and revived. Elijah took him into his arms, and carried him down, and gave him to his mother, saying, "See, thy son liveth." Think of her astonishment and joy! Her affection for the prophet, and her confidence in God returned, and she exclaimed, "Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth."

My dear children, you must all die as the widow's son did. But there will be no prophet Elijah to bring you back to life. It is many, many years since God has suffered such miracles to be performed. You must die, and be laid in the grave, but where will your soul be? Your

immortal soul that will never die. Ah, that is a solemn question? You wish to go to heaven, but you cannot go there unless you are sorry for your sins, and trust in Jesus Christ, and love and obey God. If you do these things, your souls, when you die, will go to God. And when, at the resurrection, your bodies will rise from the dead, and be united to your spirits, Jesus Christ, your Saviour, who died for you, will gather you like lambs in his arms, and carry you in his bosom. The widow's son died again, but good people in heaven never die. They will live there for ever to praise God, and do his will.

CHAPTER VI.

ELIJAH GOES TO MEET AHAB.

God sends Elijah to Ahab—Ahab searches for Elijah—Ahab and Obadiah seek for water—Character of Obadiah—Elijah meets Obadiah—Ahab comes to Elijah—Prophets and people commanded to meet on Mount Carmel.

AFTER many days, the word of the Lord came to Elijah, saying, "Go, show thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth." Elijah went southward, past the great city of Tyre, on his way to Samaria, to present himself before king Ahab.

While Elijah had dwelt at Zarephath, the famine had been dreadful in Israel, and the sufferings of the peo-

ple had been great. Probably, many had died of hunger. Yet Ahab had not repented of his idolatry, and sought forgiveness and help from God. He spent much time in sending into different countries to find Elijah ; foolishly thinking that the prophet could bring rain upon the earth, though he could do nothing except what God enabled him to do. Since so much pains were taken to find Elijah, it seems a little strange that he was not discovered, as he was all the while in the country of Phœnicia, where queen Jezebel was born, and where all her friends lived. But it was easy for God to conceal him from his enemies.

Ahab told Obadiah, who was go-

vernor, or steward of the palace, to search the land for brooks and springs of water where his horses might drink, for they were in danger of dying with thirst. So Obadiah took one road, and Ahab himself took another. Obadiah was a good man, who feared and served God. Some time before this, the wicked queen Jezebel, who was determined to put an end to the worship of God in her dominions, had murdered all the Lord's prophets whom she could find. Obadiah had then concealed a hundred of them in caves, and fed them with bread and water. This he did because he loved God and the friends of God, though he knew that the queen

would punish him severely, and perhaps take his life, if she discovered it.

Obadiah began to serve the Lord in his youth. There were not many good men in Israel at that time. Almost all the people were idolaters. But Obadiah chose to obey the true God, though others should ridicule him for it. And he was wise in doing so. The Lord loves those that serve him, and especially those that begin to serve him early. Obadiah was prudent, and honest, and faithful. Ahab, though he had many idolaters about him, who would flatter and try to please him, did not trust them so much as he trusted Obadiah. He knew that Obadiah, who feared the Lord, would be faith-

ful to the king. Solomon said in the Proverbs which he wrote, "Happy is the man that findeth wisdom. Length of days is in her right hand, and in her left hand, riches and honour."

As Obadiah was going to look for springs of water, he met Elijah; and when he saw him, he fell on his face before him. This was a common way of saluting superiors among the Israelites, and it showed that Obadiah felt great respect for Elijah, though Obadiah was a great man at the court of Ahab, and Elijah was a poor man, and much disliked by the king and queen. The steward of the king's household was much trusted and honoured. He wore a

robe of a peculiar kind, bound with a precious girdle, and carried on his shoulder a richly ornamented key. This was to show that all the keys of the palace were committed to his care. Obadiah said, "Art thou my lord Elijah?" And Elijah answered, "I am: go tell thy lord, behold Elijah is here." But Obadiah said that he did not like to do this, because that Ahab had been very earnestly seeking for Elijah in all the kingdoms and nations around. Obadiah thought that Ahab had made such a diligent search, that he would certainly have found Elijah if God had not hid him. And he feared to tell the king that Elijah was there, lest the Spirit of God should take him

away, and hide him again, before Ahab could come to the place. If that should happen, Ahab would think he had been deceived, and would be very angry with Obadiah, and probably kill him. But Elijah said, "As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, I will surely show myself unto the king to-day." Then Obadiah went to find Ahab, and told him. And when Ahab came to Elijah, he said to him, "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" Elijah answered that he had not troubled Israel, but that the king and all his family had done it, because they had not obeyed the commands of God, but had forsaken him, and served Baal and other gods. "Now,

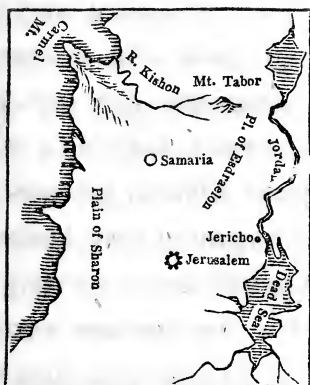
therefore," said Elijah to the king, "send, and gather to me all Israel unto Mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred, which eat at Jezebel's table." It was very bold in Elijah to speak in this manner to the king, who was so angry with him; but God gave him authority to do it, and Ahab feared to disobey him, because he knew that God was his friend. Perhaps Ahab hoped that, if he followed these directions, Elijah would pray for rain.

CHAPTER VII.

ELIJAH OVERCOMES THE PROPHETS
OF BAAL.

Description of Mount Carmel—Elijah addresses the people—Elijah's challenge to the prophets of Baal—Conduct of the prophets of Baal—Heathen priests—Baal does not hear—Elijah mocks the priests of Baal—Elijah builds an altar for sacrifice—Fire from heaven consumes the sacrifice—Prophets of Baal slain—God commanded the Israelites to put idolaters to death—Elijah foretells rain—He goes up to the top of Carmel—A little cloud appears—A heavy rain follows—Address to children.

THE morning dawned. The sun arose, and shone upon the hills, and valleys, and cities of Israel. Its earliest rays brightened the top of Mount Carmel. This is a high mountain or promontory jutting out into the Medi-



terranean sea. It was usually so green and flourishing that the Hebrew poets chose it whenever they wished for any image of beauty and loveliness. Thus Isaiah spoke of the excellency, or splendid ornaments of Carmel. The very name of Carmel signified the garden of God. The top was covered with vines and oaks; farther down were olive and

laurel trees. Fragrant and beautiful flowers grew wild in every part of the mountain. Many brooks, clear as crystal, ran down its sides to the river Kishon, between banks thickly overgrown with bushes.

But Carmel was now stripped of its beauty. Its streams were dried up, and all its trees and shrubs were scorched and brown, as though the hot blast of the desert had passed over it. And the whole land, which had once been so beautiful, had become desolate and bare. South of Carmel was the plain of Sharon; but its roses were withered. Eastward was the great plain of Esdraelon, sprinkled over with cities and villages. These had once been sur-

rounded by delightful gardens, where the olive spread out its thick shade, and the fig, and pomegranate, and citron were loaded with delicious fruit; where flowers and spicy shrubs had been cultivated,—such as spike-nard, and myrrh, and frankincense, and aloes. But nothing now appeared except the naked and barren branches of the trees. The flowery pastures of the plain were dried up, and the wheat and barley which used to wave on those rich and level fields were no more to be seen. The seed which had been cast into the ground had perished there from the want of moisture. The songs of the reapers, and the rolling of the threshing wain, were no longer heard in

the plains, nor the shouting of those who gathered and trod out the grapes among the hills. The cattle and sheep which had not died of famine, moaned and drooped in the fields, and the wild asses stood upon the high places, and snuffed up the wind, because they were tormented with thirst. Far to the eastward, Mount Tabor rose out of the plain, in shape like a cone or sugar-loaf. But deprived of its crown of verdure, it stood like a monument of the anger of God. The ground, parched and baked by the sun, had in many places cracked and opened, and the whole land appeared as though it had been burned over with fire. The heaven above was like brass, and

the earth beneath like iron, and the rain of the land powder and dust. Even in the places where brooks and rivulets had formerly run, the reeds and flags had withered, and the fishes had died. The joyful sound of the harp and the tabret had ceased among men, and the whole land seemed to mourn and languish for the wickedness of the king and nation.

A multitude of people stood on Mount Carmel, and many others were hastening over the plain, and toiling up the sides of the mountain. All the Israelites had been called together by Ahab at the request of Elijah, and they had left their cities and villages to obey the command of

their king. The princes of the tribes of Israel, the heads of families, genealogists and judges, were there, and so were king Ahab and the officers of his court. Four hundred and fifty prophets or priests of Baal stood ready to do honour to their god, but the prophets of Jehovah had been driven away into concealment by the persecutions of Ahab and Jezebel. Most of that great crowd of people had followed the example of their king, and become idolaters; and if there were any among them who still loved and served the true God, they were obliged to do it secretly.

Not far off was an altar where sacrifices had once been offered to Jeho-

vah, but it was now in ruins. The king and queen, with the assistance of the idolatrous priests, had nearly banished the worship of God from their dominions; and while idols were set up in the groves, and temples for idols were built in their cities, the altars of Jehovah were broken down. It was common for the Israelites to be assembled together in this way on great and solemn occasions, when God had serious and important business to transact with them. They were thus gathered together at the foot of Mount Sinai when God gave them his law, which entirely forbade every kind of idolatry. They came together at Shechem, at the command of Joshua, just before his death. He

feared that they would be tempted by the example of the nations around to worship false gods. He told them all the wonderful things that God had done for them, and then asked whether they would serve him, or whether they chose to serve the gods of the heathen. The people solemnly promised and made a covenant that they would serve the Lord. Joshua wrote their words in a book, and set up a great stone under an oak in Shechem, to witness against them if they ever forgot their promise. And now, many years afterwards, when the nation had broken the engagement which their fathers had made for them, Elijah, in the name and at the command of God,

had called them together on Mount Carmel.

We do not know what the thoughts and expectations of the people were, as they waited to see what Elijah would do. Perhaps they hoped that he would pray for rain, and that God would send rain in answer to his prayer. But when God punishes his people for doing wrong, he does not commonly remove the punishment until they are sorry, and confess their sins, and begin to forsake them. God was not only the Creator and Governor of the Israelites, but he was their king in a very peculiar manner. He not only gave them such rules to regulate their conduct as he gives to other men ;

but he made laws for their nation, such laws as, in other countries, are made by the king or the members of the legislature. This added greatly to their guilt and disobedience. They had committed what is called a national sin. It was not only a sin against their God, but against the governor and laws of their nation. God would not remove his judgment till they were penitent.

And how did Elijah feel as he looked at this great multitude, in which, as he supposed, there was not one person who would boldly declare himself a worshipper of the God of Israel? He could say with David, "Rivers of waters run down

mine eyes, because they keep not thy law. I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved because they kept not thy word." He may be thinking of former times, when his countrymen went up in multitudes to worship on Mount Zion; when the smoke ascended from the altar of burnt offerings, and the songs of the Levites were heard, and all the tribes of Israel bowed before Jehovah in the courts of the temple. But now, how changed! They stand before him as a nation of idolaters, with their king, and their great men, and the prophets of Baal. But see! Elijah is approaching to speak to the people. How earnestly do they fasten their eyes upon him. What

a breathless silence reigns in that great assembly.

He said to them, "How long halt ye between two opinions? How long do ye doubt and hesitate who is the true God? If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him. If Jehovah has showed himself to be the true God, by the many wonderful things he has done for your nation, follow him; but if Baal can do greater things than these, then follow him." Perhaps the people had attempted to unite the service of God with the worship of Baal. The prophets of Baal would permit this, for the heathen did not care how many gods men worshipped. But Jeho-

vah would not suffer his people to pray unto and praise any god except himself, for there is no other being who could answer their prayers, or who was worthy of their praises.

The people answered not a word when Elijah spoke to them in this manner. They could say nothing to excuse themselves. They knew that Jehovah was the true God. They knew that they were guilty in forsaking him. Their consciences kept them silent. Ahab too was silent, and the prophets of Baal were silent. They had not expected to be addressed so plainly by Elijah, and they lost their courage. They did not think Elijah would be bold

enough to condemn Baal before the king and the nation. Elijah said unto the people, "I, even I only, remain a prophet of the Lord; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men." He then proposed a way in which it might be seen who was the true God. He requested that two bullocks might be brought, and that the prophets of Baal would kill one, and cut it in pieces, and lay it upon an altar; and he would kill the other, and cut it in pieces, and lay it upon the altar of Jehovah. The God who sent fire to burn the sacrifice should be believed and trusted in as the true God. And the people said it was well; let it be done.

Now Baal was the sun; and the image which was sometimes made to represent Baal was the figure of a young man, with his right hand raised, and holding a whip; while his left hand grasped a thunderbolt. This figure was covered with gold.

Elijah said unto the prophets of Baal, "Choose you one bullock for yourselves, and dress it first; for ye are many; and call on the name of your gods, but put no fire under." And they took the bullock which was given them, and dressed it, and laid it on an altar, and called on the name of Baal, from morning even until noon, saying, "O Baal, hear us!" But there was no voice, nor any that answered. And they leaped up and

down at the altar, that is, they danced around it with horrid cries, tossing their heads to and fro, and making many strange gestures. Perhaps they also sung hymns in honour of Baal, for the heathen used to compose hymns in praise of their idols, just as Christians do in praise of the only true God. The heathen priests, when they prophesied, used to be wild and furious in their motions. Sometimes they foamed at the mouth, and appeared like persons distracted. In this they were very different from the prophets of God, who were calm and tranquil in their manner, and spoke with great gravity and composure. From morning until noon, the priests of Baal

continued that senseless clamour, "O Baal, hear us!" repeating the same words and the same extravagant actions, till every body must have been weary. Elijah waited patiently for them, and the people waited for their god to show his power. But no fire appeared upon their altar, and no answer was made to their prayers. This was not strange, for who could answer them? The image of Baal that was in the temple at Samaria? That was only wood or stone. It had eyes, but they could not see; ears, but they could not hear; a mouth, but it could not speak; hands, but they could not move. How could it send fire to burn the victim on Mount

Carmel? Could the sun answer them? No. It was placed in the heavens by God to give light and heat, but it could no more hear the cries of the priests of Baal than a fire or a lamp could hear them. Yet if the sun had been alive, and had been a god, it seems as if he might easily have sent down a little fire, in compliance with the request of his worshippers. Could Satan, or any of the evil angels who had been driven out of heaven, and who tempt men to do wrong, answer the calls of the priests of Baal, and send fire to burn their sacrifice? Perhaps they might have done it if God had given them leave, for they love to encourage people in wickedness.

But they can do nothing without permission from God.

At noon Elijah began to mock the priests of Baal by speaking ironically, as people sometimes do when they wish to show the folly or absurdity of any thing. He told them to cry aloud. As if he had said, "Though you have been crying aloud for many hours, it is necessary to call still louder, for it is plain that Baal does not hear you. Cry aloud, for he is a god. You think him to be a god, and the greatest of gods; surely then he will answer you by-and-by, when he is ready. Either he is talking, or meditating, or he is hunting some animal, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he sleeps

and must be awaked." Thus Elijah mocked them, that all the people might see how ridiculous it was to worship a god who was employed in such a way, and who could not hear when men called upon him. The priests of Baal did not understand that Elijah spoke in irony, but thought him in earnest, for they were unwise enough to suppose that a god might be doing such things, and that he might be at such a distance as not to be able to hear. So they cried still louder, and cut themselves, as they were accustomed to do, with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them, and perhaps mingled with the blood of their sacrifice. It

was a foolish custom among the heathen, to cut their arms and hands when they wished to show their affection for any person, when they mourned for their dead friends, and when they prayed to their idols. The Israelites were forbidden to do it by the law of God.

They continued their prayers and exclamations till the sun had sunk towards the west, and threw its rays aslant over the Mediterranean, making the tops of the waves to shine, and casting the shadows upon the mountain far to the eastward. But there was no voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded.

How strangely and wickedly men conduct themselves when they for-

sake God, and follow the guidance of their own imaginations! Think of four hundred and fifty priests of Baal, leaping and dancing around an altar, tossing their heads, distorting their faces, cutting their arms till the blood flowed out. Hear the confused screaming of so many voices, crying, "O Baal, hear us!" from morning till the middle of the afternoon, and then look at the serious, rational, and sober appearance of Elijah.

It was three o'clock, the hour of the evening sacrifice at the temple in Jerusalem, when Elijah, who had given the prophets of Baal nearly the whole day to show what their god could do, thought it was time to

interrupt them. He said unto all the people, "Come near unto me." And all the people came near unto him. And he took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the word of the Lord came, saying, "Israel shall be thy name." And with the stones he repaired the altar of the Lord, and he made a trench about the altar, large enough to contain eighteen quarts of seed. And he put the wood in order, and cut the bullock in pieces, and laid him on the wood, and said, "Fill four barrels with water, and pour it on the sacrifice, and on the wood." And he said, "Do it the second time." And they did it the second time.

And he said, "Do it the third time" And they did it the third time. And the water ran round about the altar ; and he filled the trench also with water. And it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near, and said, " Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the Lord God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again."

When Elijah had offered this short and solemn prayer, so different

from the noisy and irreverent worship of the priests of Baal, the fire of the Lord fell upon the altar, perhaps in the form of lightning shooting



down from the sky. It consumed the sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and dried up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, "The Lord, he is the God; the Lord, he is the God."

The Lord had often made himself known to the Israelites in this way. On one occasion, in the days of Moses and Aaron, "There came a fire out from before the Lord, and consumed upon the altar the burnt-offering." On another occasion, when Gideon was offering a sacrifice upon a rock, the angel of the Lord touched the flesh, and unleavened cakes, with the end of his staff, and

“there rose up fire from the rock, and consumed them.” When David was sacrificing in the threshing-floor of Ornon, the Jebusite, to stop the plague among his people, the Lord “answered him from heaven by fire upon the burnt-offering.” When Solomon had ended his prayer at the dedication of the temple, “the fire came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt-offering and sacrifices.”

Elijah had no doubt that God would appear in the same manner on the present occasion, and he wished that all the people should see for themselves, that the fire really came down from heaven. It was for this reason that he com-

manded so much water to be poured on the burnt-sacrifice, and on the wood, and in the trench round about the altar. It would be plain to the Israelites that Elijah could not have deceived them by concealing fire near the altar, and then pretending that it came down from the skies. They knew that such a deception was impossible in these circumstances. They were, therefore, so fully convinced that the fire was sent by God, that they all fell on their faces, and said, "The Lord, he is the God; the Lord, he is the God!"

And Elijah said unto the people, "Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape." And they

took them, and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, which winds around the foot of Mount Carmel, and slew them there. Elijah did not kill the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal because he was cruel, and liked to take away the lives of men. It was probably a very painful duty for him to perform. But God had commanded that idolaters should be put to death; and these priests, in connexion with Ahab and Jezebel, had tempted the whole nation of Israel to depart from God, and break his laws. When they were put to death, justice was done, Jehovah was honoured, and God was then ready to send a blessing upon the Israelites.

Elijah told Ahab to go and refresh himself with food and drink, for he heard a sound in the air which convinced him that there would soon be an abundance of rain. So Ahab went, probably into his tent, to eat and to drink, for this had been a day of great fatigue and anxiety. But Elijah did not indulge himself in this manner. He went up to the top of Carmel, and cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees. This was a posture for prayer, and the prophet was undoubtedly occupied in earnestly praying to God to send rain upon the land. He told his servant to go up to the brow of the mountain, and look out upon the sea. He

went, but soon returned, and said that he saw nothing; and Elijah told him to go again seven times. He went; and the seventh time he came to Elijah, and said, "Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand." Elijah knew that it would bring rain, for the storms in that country come from the Mediterranean. That was the reason why he had sent his servant to look out upon the sea for the first appearance of a cloud. Rain also usually comes in that country in the evening, and it was then near the close of the day. Elijah then told his servant to say to Ahab, "Prepare thy chariot and return home, that the rain stop thee not."

Meanwhile, the cloud, which was, at first, but a little speck upon the horizon, rose and spread till the whole sky was covered with blackness. The wind swept furiously across the mountain, and the rain fell in torrents. Such storms often rise at the east end of the Mediterranean, and they are very dangerous to ships. Sailors call them Levanters.

Ahab rode towards Jezreel, where he had a palace, and where his family were at that time. Though Elijah must have been wearied with the services of the day, and exhausted by the want of food, yet God gave him strength, so that he fastened his girdle around his loose robe

of sackcloth which he wore, and ran before the chariot of Ahab, more than thirty miles, to the gate of Jezreel.

Now, before I close this chapter, if I were to ask all my young readers who is the true God? not one of them would hesitate a moment what answer to give. All of them would say, the God who has given us the Bible is the true God. He made us; and he made the earth, and the sun, and the stars, and every thing else that exists. He takes care of us, and gives our friends, and our food and clothes, and all that we need. He gave his Son to die on the cross for our sins. He is the God who ought to be loved and obeyed.

Then let me ask if you do love and obey him. He commands you to do this. He says, "My son, give me thine heart." Have you given your heart to God? I hope some of you have done so. But I fear some of you have not done it. In that case, when I talk with you about God, you must be silent, as the Israelites were when Elijah talked with them. How wicked it is for children not to love God and obey him, when he is so good, and so kind to them. They love their parents who take care of them; but they do not love God, they do not obey him, they do not think of him, though he is all the while doing so much to make them happy. When children love God, they can go and

pray to him, and ask him, for Christ's sake, to forgive them for all the wrong things they have ever done, or spoken, or thought. They can lie down, and not be afraid, for God will watch over them, and not let them be hurt. And if they should die before morning, they hope they shall go to heaven, where many good children have gone before them;—where Christ is, and where God is.

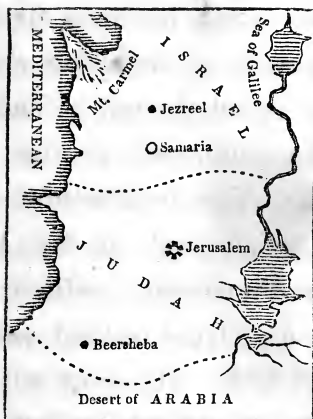
Will you not, then, my dear children, begin to love and serve God now? He says, "I love them that love me, and those that seek me early shall find me." Begin to love God now, and you will be safe and happy, and if you live to grow up, you will be useful men and women.

CHAPTER VIII.

ELIJAH IN THE DESERT.

Jezebel threatens Elijah—He escapes to the desert—He wishes to die—He sleeps under a juniper tree—An angel brings him bread and water—Description of angels—Elijah forty days without food—Two branches of the Red sea—Horeb between them—Description of the desert—Mountains of Sinai—Elijah on Horeb—God passes before Elijah—The wind—The earthquake—The fire—The still small voice—Elijah commanded to go to Damascus—We should be thankful that God reigns—Elijah chooses Elisha.

WHEN Ahab came to his palace at Jezreel, he went in and told his queen what had happened. As soon as she heard that all the priests of her god Baal had been slain by Elijah, she was very angry with him.



She instantly sent a messenger to tell Elijah that queen Jezebel swore by her gods that she would treat Elijah as he had treated the prophets of Baal, before that hour the next evening. Elijah was much fatigued, and needed rest; but when he heard this threatening message, he arose in haste, and fled from the city. He

had shown great boldness all day in the presence of the king and the people of Israel, though he had stood alone, and opposed to the whole multitude. Yet he was now alarmed and distressed at the threats of an angry woman. Much of his courage and trust in God seems to have left him. He went out of Israel, and through the land of Judah into Beersheba, which lay on its southern borders. Here he left his servant, who may have been too weary to go any farther. But he dared not stop himself. He went a day's journey southward into the wilderness, and sat down under a juniper tree to rest. It is not certainly known what tree this was,

but if it was not a tall species of juniper, it was probably a cedar, or some kind of evergreen.

When Elijah sat down under the tree in the wilderness, he felt wearied and sad. Though God had aided him in his endeavours to do good to the Israelites, and had so kindly protected him when he was in danger, he forgot the scenes on Mount Carmel, and was discouraged and sinfully impatient. He wished that he might die, and go into a world where he should not be persecuted, or troubled by wicked people. He said, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers."

It was wrong for Elijah to despair

thus. It was wrong for him to wish to die, and leave the work which God had appointed for him to do in the world. It was wrong for him to be so much afraid of Jezebel. He should have remained in the kingdom of Israel, and trusted in God to protect him. It was his duty to preach to the people, and attempt to reform them. Their minds would be better prepared to listen to his instructions, after the miracle on Mount Carmel.

Elijah lay and slept under the juniper tree. He was alone. On every side was a wild desert country. He felt some person touch him. He opened his eyes, and there was an angel of God. The angel said

to him, "Arise, and eat." He looked around, and saw a cruse of water standing near, and a cake which had been baked on the coals. Elijah had been a long time without food, and was faint and weary. He ate the bread, and drank the water. He knew that they were placed there by the same Being who commanded the ravens to bring him food, by the side of the brook Cherith. When he had finished his meal, he laid him down again and slept. And, the second time, an angel touched him, and said, "Arise, and eat, because the journey [which thou art about to take] is too great for thee."

Elijah seemed to be alone in the

desert, far from the habitations of men. He probably did not think that any one was near him but God. Yet an angel was watching over him, and preparing him food.

The angels are bright and glorious beings who stand around the throne of God, and sing sweet songs of praise, while they play on their golden harps. Their knowledge is far greater than that of men. They are full of love to God and one another, and to all the creatures whom God has made. They are perfectly holy, and never do wrong. They are strong, active, and powerful, and ever beautiful and young. They are swift messengers of God to do his will in every part of the universe,

and they have been many times sent to this world on errands of kindness and mercy. We have reason to believe that they often watch over and protect good men, especially when they are in trouble or danger. King David thought so when he wrote in one of his beautiful psalms, "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them." And the writer of the ninety-first psalm thought so, when he said to every person who is a friend of God, "for he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways." Even the Greek poet Hesiod, who lived at about the same time that Elijah did, believed this, though he was a

heathen, for he wrote in one of his poems that a multitude of spirits keep a watchful guard around men, and observe their actions.

We cannot see the angels, because our eyes are not so made as to perceive spiritual beings. But it is delightful to think, especially when we are alone, and in sorrow, that they may be watching over us, and aiding us, and giving us pleasant thoughts. If our souls could escape from our bodies, we might perhaps see them all around us, and hear their voices praising God, or speaking to each other of his works.

When Elijah had finished his meal, the last he was to eat for many days, he fastened his girdle

around him, and prepared for a journey. He was going to Mount Horeb; where God had formerly given the law to his people. It is not known why he wished to go there, but it was, probably, that he might spend some time in prayer and meditation in the place where God had once appeared to his fathers, and where he would be in no danger of being disturbed by his enemies.

The northern part of the Red sea divides into two gulfs. The eastern is called the gulf of Akaba, or the Elanitic gulf; and the western, the gulf of Suez. The peninsula between these gulfs is the desert of Sinai; and on this peninsula are the

mountains of Sinai and Horeb. North of this peninsula, and south of Palestine, is the desert of Paran.

Elijah has just entered the borders of this desert. He walks forward through the soft sand. All the plain around him, as far as he can see, appears like an ocean of sand rolled into waves by the winds. Presently his path lies among hills, but they are covered with sand, which is loose and shifting like that upon the plain. Every breeze moves it, and blows it into the face of the traveller. Sometimes a whirlwind suddenly raises it into a column, which appears to reach the sky, and resembles the water-spouts that are seen by sailors, far out at sea. Then

it is scattered and falls like showers, to the great distress of travellers, who cannot breathe without drawing the fine dust and sand into their lungs.

The sun shines fiercely in those deserts, and its beams are reflected from the sand with a scorching glare, so that travellers can scarcely endure the excessive heat. How re-



freshing would be the shade of a tree or a spot of green turf.

Elijah continued to go towards the south. On his left hand was the valley of Ghor, through which, it is supposed, the river Jordan used to run to the gulf of Akaba, before the anger of God against the Sodomites caused it to overflow its banks, and spread out into the lake that is called the Dead sea. The populous country of Idumea, or Edom, was on the mountains of Seir, east of the valley of Ghor. The inhabitants were said to dwell in the clefts of the rock, because many of the palaces and temples of Petra, their capital city, were cut out of the rocks. On the right hand of Elijah,

though at a greater distance, was Egypt, then the most powerful kingdom in the world.

He was passing through the desert where the Israelites had wandered forty years before they settled in the land of Canaan. It was called a desert land, a waste howling wilderness, and that great and terrible wilderness wherein were fiery serpents, scorpions, and drought, where there was no water. It was also called a land of deserts and of pits,—a land of drought, and of the shadow of death,—a land that no man passed through, and where no man dwelt.

The difficulty of walking through the burning sand was increased by

large quantities of sharp black flint stones, that were scattered over the plain; and it was painful to see the bones of men and animals who had died of thirst and fatigue in this terrible wilderness.

Yet there is water here and there in the desert; if it were not so, all who attempt to pass through it would perish with thirst. Sometimes a little spring, bursting out from the ground, causes an oasis, or an island of verdure, in the midst of the sand. Here are usually found palm trees, from whose branches, under the tuft of leaves at the top, the dates are suspended in beautiful clusters. These fountains are often surrounded by grass and elegant flowering plants and shrubs.

The traveller, weary and parched with thirst, sees the tall trees at a distance, and hastens to lie down under their shade, and to drink of the cooling waters. But sometimes he is disappointed by finding these wells bitter, or so salt as to increase his thirst.

Sometimes, after having wandered long amid the scorching sands, Elijah ascended a hill, and looked down into a deep and narrow valley, that was filled with trees. The water had collected there during the winter rains, and rendered the soil fertile. Here were tamarisks, and plantations of palms, and groves of acacia, a light and delicate tree from which is distilled the gum

arabic. The thorny shrub gharkad grew there. It produces juicy and refreshing berries, in taste a little like a gooseberry. These were beautiful spots, ornamented with flowers, and giving a cooling shade. The wandering shepherds fed their flocks in these valleys. When all the plants in one of them were gone, they sought for another.

Elijah could not have gone straight forward on his journey, for he was forty days in reaching Horeb, which was not more than two hundred miles south of Beersheba. We do not know what made him so long on his journey. In that pathless wilderness he may sometimes have lost his way, and wandered far with-

out coming any nearer to Horeb. And he may have been sick or weary, and unable to proceed; or he may have chosen to remain, for a while, by the side of a well, or in some of the shady valleys. Sometimes he may have seen at a distance a camp of Ishmaelites, who roved over the wilderness in search of plunder, and of pastures for their flocks. Elijah would not like to approach these bold robbers; for though he had no money, they might take away his garments, as their descendants now often strip travellers of all their valuable clothing. He may have sometimes seen, far off on the borders of the horizon, a caravan, or company of merchants, going down

to Egypt, or returning from that country homeward.

Now a solitary Ishmaelite may have passed on his camel at a distance, or bands of men armed with swords and long spears may have glided by swiftly on their fleet horses. Here, the prophet may have been in danger from a scorpion basking in the sun, and there, from a high pillar of sand whirling wildly over the desert. Sometimes he may have been very thirsty, while the sands glowed like a furnace around him, and thought he saw at a distance a transparent lake or river, which seemed to reflect every object around it. But, ah ! he is mistaken ; there is no water there. It

is only the mirage, which often deceives and disappoints travellers. It is caused by the reflection of the rays of the sun from the vapours which rise out of the heated earth. When a person who has been long suffering from want of water sees this appearance, he hastens forward to quench his thirst. But he soon finds, as he endeavours to approach it, that it flies farther and farther from his reach, and at last learns, to his great distress, that he has been following a shadow.

Elijah had fled from danger, but he could not have found himself much more safe in the desert than he would have been in the land of Israel. Among other dangers which

have been mentioned, he was exposed to the simoom, that often blows in those countries from the south-east. It is a hot wind which sometimes lasts several hours. It causes weakness, languor, and discouragement, and those who breathe it feel as though they had inhaled fire. The way to avoid it is to fall upon the ground, and cover the face. It is always safest to be found in the path of duty.

Here is the wilderness of Sinai. It is rugged and mountainous, but some of the valleys are fruitful. Elijah is toiling over the steep and slippery rocks. He has fasted during the whole forty days of his journey, as Moses fasted forty days when he

received the law from God, in this very wilderness. God gave Elijah strength to endure all the fatigue of travelling through the desert without food.

At length he sees, at a distance, on the south and south-west, a long range of high mountains. The tops are shaggy and pointed, the sides are steep and shattered. As he approaches nearer, he sees before him two high peaks which are surrounded by abrupt cliffs of red granite, several hundred feet high. Their tops are composed of naked rock, and sharpened in the shape of a wedge. These mountains stand close together; one of them is Sinai, the other, Horeb.

Elijah goes on, mile after mile, up a frightful ravine, so narrow and overhung with rocks that the moonlight cannot penetrate into it. At last he enters a more open valley, about half a mile wide, and draws near to Horeb, the Mount of God. He ascends the mountain with great difficulty, and enters into a deep and solitary cavern. He is faint and weary, but he has no home, and no kind mother or sister to cheer and comfort him. There is no widow of Zarephath here to provide for him, and he cannot expect that the ravens will feed him on the mountain, as they did by the brook Cherith. But he can get water from the springs that break out on the top

of Horeb, and trickle over its rocks ; and many fruits grow on the trees and bushes in the valleys around.

Still I do not think that Elijah was happy. The Bible does not tell us how he felt, but I think he was not satisfied with himself. He was alone ; but that would not trouble him if his mind was at peace, for he had been accustomed to solitude, and he loved it. When far away from the habitations of men, and from the bustle of the world, he could think of God, and pray to him, and praise him without interruption. But, perhaps, Elijah began to doubt whether it was his duty to flee from his native land, and whether it was not cowardly for a

prophet of the Lord to be so alarmed at the threats of a wicked woman.

If such were his feelings, he could not have been happy. When he knelt down in his dark cavern, and prayed to God, he would still be sorrowful and melancholy. Besides Elijah loved his country, and it made him sad to think that all his countrymen were idolaters.

We do not know how long Elijah lived on Horeb. He would every day go out from his lonely dwelling, and look on the sublime and sacred scenes around him. He had never been at Horeb before, but he had often read in the Scriptures how God descended on these mountains, in flaming fire, to make known his

holy name and law to Israel. Elijah must have been filled with continual awe. Yonder, Moses stood when God put into his hands the two tables of stone, on which were engraven the ten commandments. Here hovered ten thousand bright and beautiful angels, that came down from heaven to witness the giving of the law to the chosen people of God. Far down in yonder valley, though still some distance above the base of the mountain, stood the twelve tribes, when the voice of the trumpet became exceedingly loud and long, and the tops of Sinai were veiled in darkness, and shaken with tempests. On this projecting cliff, Moses listened to the distant shouts

of the people in the camp below, as they bowed in worship to the golden calf; and farther down, on this bold rock, his anger at their idolatry caused him to dash in pieces the tables of stone.

Now Elijah stands on one of the highest peaks of the mountain, and beholds, far away on either hand, the two branches of the Red sea; and now he shelters himself from the heat in one of the cool and fertile valleys which are common in this elevated region. Sometimes he climbs over huge masses of rock which are barren and bare; and then again he wanders amidst herbs which sprout up in the crevices, and send forth a delicious fragrance in the morning dews.

One day, when Elijah was alone in his cave, God spoke to him, and said, "What doest thou here, Elijah?" And Elijah answered, "I have been very jealous for the Lord God of Hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life to take it away." The prophet meant to say, that he had been exceedingly anxious that God should be honoured, and that the Israelites should worship and serve him; and that he had long endeavoured to persuade them to do this; but they did not regard his instructions or his prayers: they had all become

idolaters ; they had destroyed the altars of God, and slain his prophets, till Elijah was the only one left, and they were seeking to kill him.

Elijah was too much discouraged. If he had remained in Israel, he would have found many persons who would have aided him in restoring the worship of the true God. Most of the prophets, whom Obadiah had concealed, were probably alive, and waiting for happier times. But when a person is in a gloomy, desponding state of mind, he does not judge rightly on any subject. Every thing looks dark and discouraging, and he is irresolute and disheartened at every difficulty.

God then said to Elijah, "Go

forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord." Immediately the roaring of a mighty wind was heard. It swept furiously against the mountain. The trees at its foot tossed their branches wildly, and creaked and groaned in the blast. At last they were torn in pieces, and scattered over the desert. Even the mountains themselves were rent asunder, and the firm granite rocks were shivered and broken like glass. The wind passed away, but God was not in the wind.

Presently Elijah heard a hollow, rumbling sound beneath him in the depths of the mountain. It grew louder and louder. The earth trembled. It heaved and tossed like the

ocean in a storm, for it seemed as though the ground would open, and swallow every thing up. It was very terrible. Then it passed away, and all was again quiet; but God was not in the earthquake.

After the earthquake, came a fire. Mount Sinai glowed like a furnace. Fierce flames ran along the ground, and quivered in the air. They disappeared, but God was not in the fire.

Soon a still small voice was heard. That was the voice of God. Elijah was filled with awe. He wrapped his face in his mantle, as a sign of reverence, and went out, and stood in the entrance of the cave.

I do not know exactly the meaning of the scene I have just describ-



ed ; but perhaps God meant to show Elijah that the wind, and the earthquake, and the fire were at his command, and that he could easily send them to destroy his enemies, the idolatrous Israelites ; but that he preferred the still small voice of gentleness and mercy.

As Elijah stood before the cave, with his face covered, a voice came

to him again, and said, "What doest thou here, Elijah?" And he answered, as he did before, that he wished much that God should be honoured, but that the Israelites had become so idolatrous that he could do them no good, and that he was not safe among them.

God said to him, "Go return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus; and, when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria. And Jehu, the son of Nimshi, shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel; and Elisha, the son of Shaphat, of Abel-meholah, shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room. And it shall come to pass, that him that escapeth the sword of Hazael

shall Jehu slay ; and him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay. Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him.”

Seven thousand men in Israel who worshipped God ! This shows how much Elijah was mistaken when he thought he was alone.

Elijah was so jealous for the honour of the Lord God of Hosts, that he may have wondered why God did not seem to take any more notice of the idolatry of the Israelites. He thought they ought to be punished immediately. But God informed him that there were still many in

Israel who loved and obeyed him, and abhorred idolatry. For their sakes he would bear a little longer with the rest. Besides, God is patient and merciful, and does not usually punish sinners immediately, but gives them time to repent.

He had not been inattentive to the wickedness of the king and people of Israel, and he would certainly punish them if they did not repent and reform. He was preparing to do this when he told Elijah to anoint Hazael, and Jehu, and Elisha. Hazael would be a bitter enemy to the Israelites, and would do them great evil. He would set on fire their strong fortresses, and slay their young men with the sword, and

dash their children against the walls of their cities. Jehu would destroy the family, and take the throne of wicked Ahab; and Elisha would be the means of bringing on the Israelites the wrath of God, because they would not attend to his instructions. In this way God would punish the nation for their idolatry. He would bear with them longer than Elijah would have done, not because he was less displeased with their sins, but because he was far more merciful and kind than Elijah.

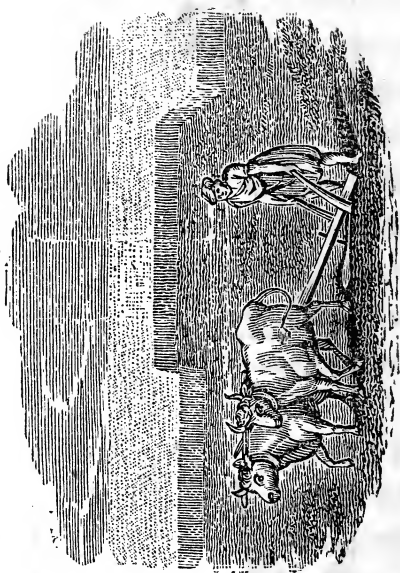
How thankful ought we to be that God reigns, and not man. Man is weak and ignorant, he is passionate and short-sighted; he would sometimes punish too soon, and some-

times too much, and sometimes those who are innocent. Elijah was angry with the whole nation, but God saw seven thousand men in it who hated Baal as really as Elijah did. Oh ! how delightful it is to think that One reigns over the world who knows every thing, and is so kind, and merciful, and slow to anger.

Elijah departed from Horeb. We do not know the way that he took, but it is generally supposed that he went around the east end of the Dead sea, and through the land of Gilead to Damascus, which lay on the north-east of the land of Israel. On his way to Damascus, or on his return, he went over the Jordan to



Abel-meholah, near the foot of Mount Gilboa. He entered a field where a man was ploughing. He was probably a rich man, for he had twelve



yoke of oxen. The plough was a simple instrument, with a beam in front to fasten it to the oxen, and a slight frame behind with handles, or perhaps a single handle for a

man to take hold of, and a sharp piece of wood or iron, which rested on the ground, and projected from the frame towards the end of the shaft. This made openings in the earth, but they were not very deep. The man who was ploughing with this light instrument found it necessary to lean heavily upon it, or it would not break the ground sufficiently. He could not look back, or be inattentive to his business.

But Elijah knew that it was Elisha, the son of Shaphat, whom he had been commanded to anoint as his successor ; and, as he passed by, he threw his mantle upon him. He did this to show that Elisha must leave his farm, and go with him,

and be a prophet of God, and prepare himself to take the place of Elijah, when he should be removed from this world. Elisha understood this to be his meaning, for he left his oxen, and ran after Elijah, and said, "Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee." Elijah gave him permission ; and he went and killed two pair of oxen, and boiled their flesh over a fire which he made of the yokes. He made a feast for his parents and neighbours, and bade them an affectionate farewell. Then he cheerfully left all his possessions, and went with Elijah, and waited upon him, and attended to his instructions. Elijah could no longer

complain that he was alone, for he had now a companion who could help and comfort him.

Elisha was kind and affectionate towards his parents. He was doubtless an obedient and dutiful son. God promises to bless those that honour their parents. The Bible does not tell us how the father and mother of Elisha felt, when they bade him adieu. They must have been very sorrowful at parting with him, and at being left alone in their old age. But I believe they were still glad that their son was called to be a prophet of the Lord, and to be the successor of so great and so good a man as Elijah. It would comfort them to hear from him sometimes.

and to hear from others how much he was respected and beloved by all the good people in the nation. Solomon says, "The father of the righteous shall greatly rejoice." What child would not be good and kind to his parents, and when he grows up be a useful and respectable man, that his father and his mother may be glad?

Elijah and Elisha probably went from house to house, and privately taught such of the people as were willing to listen to them. But they also spent much of their time in establishing schools for the prophets. These were places where young men, who wished to become prophets of God, could go and study

and pray, and prepare themselves to instruct the people. I think Elijah and Elisha would not have been permitted to have done this, if Ahab and Jezebel had not been much occupied in carrying on wars against the king of Syria.

CHAPTER IX.

NABOTH'S VINEYARD.

Ahab covets Naboth's vineyard—Naboth refuses to sell it—Israelites forbidden to sell their land—Ahab displeased with Naboth—Jezebel promises to give Ahab the vineyard—Ancient custom of sealing letters—Naboth falsely accused, and slain—Ahab seizes the vineyard—Elijah sent to Ahab in the vineyard—Ahab humbles himself.

SEVERAL years had passed away since the prophet Elijah returned from Mount Horeb. During that time Benhadad, king of Syria, had twice brought a large army against the Israelites, expecting to subdue them, and take possession of their country. But God directed Ahab what to do, and enabled him to con-

quer the Syrians, though his army was much smaller than their's. But Ahab was not grateful to God, who delivered him from the Syrians. He did not repent, but grew worse and worse.

Ahab was a rich king. He had a palace in Samaria, and another in Jezreel. He had pleasant gardens, and orchards, and fields of grain, and plantations of olives. Many flocks of sheep and herds of cattle fed in his pastures. He had a palace so much inlaid and ornamented with ivory, that it was called the ivory house. Yet he was not happy. Why was not Ahab satisfied when God had given him so much wealth?

Because he had a discontented,

restless mind. All the riches in the world will not make such a person happy. He is always wanting more; and he thinks much more of what he wants than of what he has.

A vineyard, which did not belong to Ahab, lay near his palace at Jezreel. It was owned by a man of the city, whose name was Naboth.

Ahab saw it when he walked on the roof of his palace in the morning, or when the heat of the day was over. He was so covetous that he did not like to see another man's field so near his palace. It was, perhaps, the only land that Naboth owned, but the king was so selfish he did not care for that. He determined to obtain it, if he possibly

could. He went to Naboth, and said, "Give me thy vineyard, that I may have it for a garden of herbs, because it is near unto my house; and I will give thee for it a better vineyard than it; or, if it seem good to thee, I will give thee the worth of it in money." But Naboth answered, "The Lord forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee."

Now Ahab knew, or he ought to have known, that there was a law of God which forbade Naboth to sell his vineyard. The land of an Israelite was considered the property of his family as well as of himself. He had received it from his parents, and it was his duty to keep it for

his children. If he was in debt, or needed money, he might lease or mortgage his land to another man, who would return it to him or to his children at the year of jubilee, which came every fiftieth year. But if he had sold it to Ahab, it would have always remained a part of the royal possessions. This was the reason why Naboth answered the king in such a manner. He could not sell the land without disobeying the law of God, and wronging his own children, who would value the estate which came to them from their ancestors much more than any other.

But Ahab was too much hardened in wickedness to regard the com-

mands of God, or the interest of Naboth's children. He was disappointed and angry. He returned to his palace, and entered his bed-chamber, and went up to his divan. This was a sort of sofa, made by raising a part of the floor along one end of the room a few feet above the rest. This sofa was covered with a rich carpet, and spread with splendid cushions and mattresses, for sitting upon during the day, and sleeping on at night. Ahab threw himself upon a mattress, and turned his face to the wall. He wished more than ever for the vineyard. He was vexed with Naboth for presuming to deny him any thing he wanted. He did not like to yield to one of,

his own subjects, and he did not know what to do. He had been so much accustomed to be flattered and indulged, that he acted like a spoiled child. When he was informed that his table was spread, he refused to move from the place where he was, or to eat. But Jezebel, his wife, came to him, and said, "Why is thy spirit so sad, that thou eatest no bread?" And he said unto her, "Because I spake unto Naboth, the Jezreelite, and said unto him, 'Give me thy vineyard for money; or else, if it please thee, I will give thee another vineyard for it;' and he answered, 'I will not give thee my vineyard.'" Ahab did not tell the reason why Naboth

would not sell his vineyard ; but made it appear that Naboth was disobliging and unkind. But Jezebel said to him, “Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel?” If you are king of Israel, why do you not find out a way to do, in all respects, as you wish? “Arise, and eat bread, and let thy heart be merry: I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth, the Jezreelite.” Jezebel knew that she could obtain it by a most wicked and cruel action ; and she was always ready to do any thing to gratify her own proud and covetous desires, or those of her husband. She immediately wrote letters, in king Ahab’s name, to the elders and nobles of Jezreel ; and here is a copy of the letters :—

“Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people. And set two men, sons of Belial, before him, to bear witness against him, saying, ‘Thou didst blaspheme God and the king ;’ then carry him out, and stone him, that he may die.”

These letters were stamped with the king’s seal, to show that he had permitted her to give what orders she chose upon the subject. The seal was not impressed upon wax ; but it had raised letters upon it, and the queen dipped it into ink, and printed the letters on the parchment, or papyrus, or wooden tablets, on which she wrote. Then she, perhaps, enclosed the letters in a satin purse, bound together with silken strings ; for

that was customary among people of high rank.

The elders and nobles of Jezreel must have known that Naboth was an innocent man. They knew that they should offend God, and be guilty of great cruelty and injustice towards a neighbour and fellow-citizen, if they obeyed Jezebel's commands. But they dared not oppose the queen. Perhaps they were such bad men, that they did not wish to do it. It seems very likely that they were so, since they were in favour with a wicked king and queen, and had probably disobeyed the law of God, and become worshippers of idols.

They appointed a fast, to make

the people think some dreadfully sinful act had been done to offend God. And when the citizens had assembled together in great wonder and consternation, they placed Naboth before them as a criminal, and hired two false witnesses to say that he had been guilty of blasphemy and high treason. Then, without giving him time to plead his own cause, or to prove that he had been falsely accused, they condemned him to death. They also condemned his sons to die with him, though no accusation had been brought against them, for Jezebel did not wish any heir of his property to remain alive. They instantly hurried them out of the city,

and when they had gone beyond the city gate, the witnesses began to throw stones at Naboth. Then all the people threw stones at Naboth and his sons till they died.

The elders of Jezreel sent a messenger to the queen to inform her that Naboth was dead.

As soon as Jezebel heard it, she said to Ahab, "Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give thee for money; for Naboth is not alive, but dead."

Ahab well understood that Naboth had been put to death by Jezebel's orders. But he did not blame her; he did not even seem to be sorry. Perhaps he had been early instruct-

ed in the knowledge of the true God and of his law. He must have sometimes read the Holy Scriptures. He knew what was right, and what was wrong, and he had not quite dared to do so wicked a thing as to give orders himself for putting Naboth to death. But he was quite willing to have it done by Jezebel, who had been brought up in a heathen country, and had neither conscience nor principle. He was willing to have his queen use his own royal seal to induce others to take away the life of an innocent and pious man, and the lives of his children,—and all for so little a thing as a garden for vegetables, when he had gardens enough before

Naboth had been put to death in consequence of being accused of blasphemy, and treason against the government. Of course his property was forfeited to the king. Ahab went to take possession of the vineyard, perhaps in company with some of his principal officers.

In the meantime, God had commanded Elijah to go down to the vineyard of Naboth to meet Ahab, and deliver a message to him from God.

Ahab stood in the vineyard he had so long wanted. It was now his own. There was nobody alive who could take it away from him. But I do not think he was happy. Oh no! I would not have felt as he

did then for all the vineyards in the world. All around him were the vines that Naboth had planted, and pruned, and trained. He had watched them from day to day, as the clusters of grapes were ripening; and, when they were ripe, he had gone with his labourers to gather in the vintage, and carry it to the winepress, with songs and shoutings of great joy.

Why does Ahab look so fearfully around? There is nothing to be seen but the long rows of vines, and the walls of the vineyard, and the winepress, and the instruments of labour, and the neighbouring buildings. But Ahab seems to see the mangled bodies of Naboth and his

sons, who had been murdered to gratify his avarice. He was a great king, and none of his subjects could punish him ; but there was One in heaven who had seen what had been done, and that he had consented to it, and who would punish him for his injustice. Ahab knew this, and I do not believe he could quite forget it.

Ahab had taken possession of the vineyard, and was ready to return home, when a venerable man stood before him. It was Elijah, the prophet of God, the reformer of Israel. The king was filled with fear and dislike when he saw the stern countenance of Elijah. He felt guilty, and had reason to believe that God

had sent Elijah with some terrible message. And so he had.

Ahab said to the prophet, "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" And Elijah answered, "I have found thee; because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? Thus saith the Lord, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine. Behold I will bring evil upon thee, and will take away thy posterity; and all the sons and grandsons of Ahab shall die an early and violent death. And I will make thy house like the house of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, and

like the house of Baasha, the son of Ahijah, whose descendants were killed, and the kingdom passed into other families, on account of their wickedness. Him that dieth of Ahab in the city, the dogs shall eat; and he that dieth in the field shall be devoured by vultures and other ravenous birds." And of Jezebel, God said, "The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel."

In Palestine dogs were not owned by masters, and taken care of, and caressed, and loved as they are in this country. A few hunting dogs were kept, but the rest were despised and avoided. The people were not willing even to touch them. Thus they became wild and savage,

and wandered in herds about the streets of the cities, seeking for food. At night they disturbed the inhabitants by howling like wolves. As they were usually half-starved, they ate every thing they could find in the streets, especially the dead bodies of men and animals.

Elijah was commanded to deliver these terrible predictions against Ahab, because he had given himself up to do evil more than any other king of Israel ; though all of them were very wicked. He was entirely under the influence of his wife, who hated God, and his worship, and his servants, and who was continually tempting Ahab to do wrong. By following her advice he became

worse than the heathen around, and as bad as the Canaanites whom God had driven out of the country of Palestine, that the Israelites might inhabit it. It was necessary to pronounce a severe sentence against Ahab and his family, that the people might learn that God is displeased with idolatry, and will punish all who sin against him.

When Ahab heard the message of Elijah he was much alarmed. He was not sorry, in the right way, that he had sinned against God ; but he was grieved at the judgments that were coming upon himself and family. But he appeared as a penitent. He rent his clothes, and put on a garment of sackcloth, and fasted,

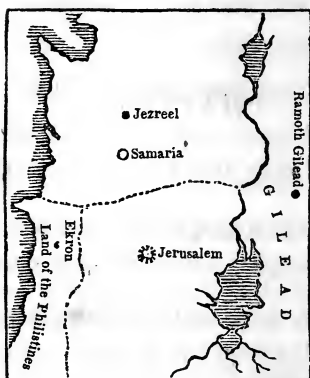
and went about with a sorrowful air. Perhaps he confessed his sins, and thought he would forsake them. And God said to Elijah, "Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me? Because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days; but in his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house."

CHAPTER X.

ELIJAH CALLS DOWN FIRE FROM HEAVEN.

Ahab slain at Ramoth-Gilead—Ahaziah injured by falling through a lattice—He sends messengers to Baal-zebub—Heathen oracles—Messengers meet Elijah—They return to Ahaziah—Soldiers sent to take Elijah—Consumed by fire from heaven—Elijah goes to Samaria.

Two years afterwards, Ahab, and Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, went with their armies to take the city of Ramoth-Gilead, which was then in possession of the Syrians. God had sent Micaiah, one of his prophets, to warn Ahab not to go, but Ahab did not regard the command of God. He went in disguise, but



he was wounded by an arrow from one of the Syrian army. His servants held him up in his chariot, while the blood streamed from his wound all day ; at night, he died. He was carried to Samaria, and buried. His chariot and harness were taken to the pool of Samaria to be washed, and there the dogs

licked the blood of Ahab, as Elijah had predicted.

Ahaziah, the son of Ahab, was the next king of Israel. He was under the influence of his mother Jezebel, and continued to do evil as his father Ahab had done. He worshipped Baal and Astarte, and encouraged the people in idolatry. When he had reigned part of two years, he was one day on the roof of his palace, or in one of the upper galleries that surrounded the court. He was probably leaning carelessly over the balustrade, for he fell through the lattice on the marble pavement in the court below. He was very much hurt, and feared he should not recover. He sent messengers

to Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, a city of Philistia; to inquire if he should ever recover from his disease.

The heathen used to pretend that their gods could foretell future events. Some of their gods were much celebrated for doing this, and these were called oracles, because they spoke or declared things that were to come. Baal-zebub was the name of one of the princes of the devils, and perhaps it was a devil whom the Ekronites worshipped under that name. I do not know whether the devil gave the answers to the persons who went to consult him, or whether the priests of the idol gave the answers, and deceived the people. In either case it was

very foolish to go to Baal-zebub, for the devil could only give such answers as God permitted him to give ; besides, he is a liar, and nothing he says can be depended upon. As for the priests, they could not tell what would happen in future, for a very plain reason ;—*they did not know*. However, I believe the cunning priests usually gave the answers themselves, for the oracles were almost always *ambiguous* ; which means that they might be explained in two different ways, so that, whatever might happen, the oracle would be found to be right.

It was strange that the heathen should be deceived in this way, but it was much more strange

that Ahaziah, who was an Israelite, should have any confidence in the oracles of Baal-zebub. He might have sent to the temple at Jerusalem to inquire of the true God by the Urim and Thummim; or he might have asked Elijah, or some of the prophets. But he was an idolater like his parents, and chose to inquire of one of the gods of the Philistines. This was a great dishonour to God, who had done so many wonderful things for the Israelites, and he was much displeased. He commanded Elijah to go and meet the messengers of Ahaziah, and told him what to say to them. Elijah met the messengers as they were going from Samaria to Ekron,

and said, "Go, turn again unto the king that sent you, and say unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that thou sendest to inquire of Baalzebub, the god of Ekron? therefore thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shall surely die." The men returned, and Ahaziah said to them, "Why are ye now turned back?" They told him that they had met a man, who had sent them back with a message which they delivered to the king. Ahaziah asked what kind of a man he was. They described him, and Ahaziah said, "It is Elijah, the Tishbite."

The armies of Israel were divided

into companies of fifty men. Each company was under the command of a captain. Ahaziah was so angry with Elijah, that he sent a captain with one of these companies, to bring him down to the palace at Samaria. The men marched along till they saw Elijah sitting on the top of a hill. He was dressed in a hairy garment, fastened around the waist with a leathern girdle. They went up to him, and the captain, as I suppose, in a haughty and insolent manner, spoke to him, "Thou man of God, the king hath said, come down." Elijah was not angry at this rudeness, on his own account; but then he knew that by insulting him, the captain had dishonoured the

great God of heaven, whose prophet Elijah was. The captain, I suppose, did not think that Elijah was a prophet. He called him a man of God only in contempt. There was something in his voice and manner which showed that he meant to ridicule the prophet. Elijah replied very solemnly, "If I be a man of God then let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty." Elijah had scarcely done speaking, when fire came down from heaven, and consumed the captain and every one of his men. I think the fire may have been great sheets of flame, wrapping the men all around. A moment before, a large company of men stood there in a

military dress, healthy, active, and joyous. Now, they have vanished, and nothing remains but small heaps of ashes on the ground. Oh, how dangerous is it to trifle with God!

The king was told by some one that the men sent to take Elijah had been consumed by fire. But kings care more about gratifying their own wishes, than they do about the lives of their soldiers. So the king determined to send a captain and fifty men more to take Elijah. They went to the hill. The captain, one would think, might have been warned by what had happened, to treat Elijah respectfully. But he spoke to him very much as the other captain had done. Elijah replied to

him just as he had replied before. The fire flashed down from the skies, and consumed the captain and all the soldiers in a moment.

Again the king sent another captain with his fifty men. And the third captain of fifty went up, and fell on his knees before Elijah, and besought him, and said unto him, "O man of God, I pray thee, let my life, and the lives of these fifty, thy servants, be precious in thy sight. Behold, there came fire down from heaven, and burnt up the two captains of the former fifties, with their fifties; therefore let my life now be precious in thy sight."

And the angel of the Lord said unto Elijah, "Go down with him;

be not afraid of him." And he arose, and went down with him unto the king. And he said unto the king, "Thus saith the Lord, Forasmuch as thou hast sent messengers to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, is it not because there is no God in Israel, [or because you think there is no God in Israel,] to inquire of his word? therefore, thou shalt not come down off that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die."

Though Elijah was so bold in declaring the message of God, Ahaziah did not dare to hurt him. He left the palace. The king soon died, and Jehoram, his brother, became king of Israel.

CHAPTER XI.

ELIJAH ASCENDS IN A FIERY CHARIOT
TO HEAVEN.

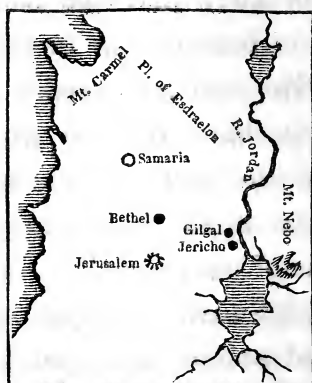
Translation of Enoch—Elijah visits the schools of the prophets—He divides Jordan with his mantle—Converses with Elisha—Taken up in a fiery chariot to heaven—His mantle caught by Elisha—Elijah divides the waters of Jordan—Sons of the prophets search for Elijah—Elijah appears again on earth.

“DUST thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return,” was the sentence pronounced on Adam and his descendants, when he had sinned against God by eating the forbidden fruit. In consequence of this sentence, the many generations of men who had lived between Adam and

Elijah had died, and their bodies had mingled with the dust. There had been but one exception; it was Enoch, a holy man, who lived about a thousand years after the creation of the world, and more than two thousand years before Elijah. He walked with God; which means, that while he lived and walked upon the earth, his thoughts and affections were in heaven, and that his chief desire was to obey God in all things. And he did not die. His soul was not separated from his body, but his mind was freed from every sin, and his body was made glorious and heavenly, and he was taken to dwell with God, without suffering the pains of death.

Elijah knew that God had determined to honour him in the same way. He also had lived a retired and holy life. He had given up many of the pleasures and luxuries which he might have enjoyed for the sake of obeying God. He had been continually opposed to the king and nobility of Israel, because they were idolaters; and had therefore been always despised and disliked. But, in spite of the contempt and anger of his countrymen, Elijah was faithful to his God; and the time had now come when he was to receive his reward.

Two venerable men were seen passing through one of the gates of Gilgal, a city near the river Jordan,



and on the north-east borders of the tribe of Benjamin. It was the city where Joshua and the Israelites encamped after they crossed the Jordan on their first entrance into the land of Canaan; and here was the monument of twelve stones, which Joshua had taken from the river, and set up as a memorial of their safe arri-

val in the country which they were to inhabit. This was one of the cities where Samuel went every year to hold courts of justice. It was also the place where Saul was crowned, and where sacrifices were sometimes offered.

The two men, who had just left Gilgal, and were turning their steps westward, were Elijah and Elisha. Elijah was going to visit, and bid farewell to some of the schools of the prophets, before he took his departure from the earth. As they walked on together, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tarry here, I pray thee; for the Lord hath sent me to Bethel." And Elisha answered, "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will

not leave thee." So they went on till they came to a city in a narrow valley, between two high rocky hills. This was Bethel. It was situated in the southern part of the tribe of Ephraim, on the borders of the land of Benjamin. In some of the fields in this valley Jacob had passed the night, when he went out from his father and his mother to go into a strange land. Here he slept, with a stone for his pillow, and dreamed he saw a ladder reaching from heaven to earth, and angels ascending and descending upon it. It was in Bethel that Jeroboam set up one of his golden calves, and made an altar near it, where the people used to sacrifice, before the

temple of Baal was built in Samaria. Elijah had established a school of the prophets here, and the young men who belonged to it came out to meet him. They had been informed that Elijah was to be removed from them, and they must have sorrowed greatly at seeing his face for the last time. They said to Elisha, "Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head to-day?" And he said, "Yea, I know it; hold you your peace."

Elisha knew that he must part with his friend and teacher, and he was much grieved, but he advised the young men to be quiet, and not disturb the composure of Elijah at such a solemn time. When Elijah

had given his parting instructions to the young men, he said to Elisha, "Tarry here, I pray thee; for the Lord hath sent me to Jericho." Perhaps Elijah wished to go alone, that he might not make any display of the honour that God was about to show him, for good men are always humble. Or perhaps he wished to try the strength of Elisha's attachment to him. But Elisha determined to enjoy the conversation and company of Elijah to the very last. He again replied, "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." They turned again eastward, and went forward together, conversing on the state of the church among the Israelites, or on the glo

ries of heaven, till they saw the towers of Jericho rising above the palm groves and plantations of balsam trees that surrounded the city. The sons of the prophets who belonged to the seminary at Jericho, had also been informed that this was the parting visit of Elijah, and they said to Elisha, "Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head to-day?" Elisha replied as before, "Yea, I know it; hold you your peace." And Elijah said to Elisha, "Tarry, I pray thee, here; for the Lord hath sent me to Jordan." And he said, "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee."

It was but a few miles to the river

Jordan. As the two prophets went towards it, fifty young men from the school of the prophets followed afar off to see what would be done. The river Jordan rolled onwards to the Dead sea between rows of willows, and tamarisks, and oleanders. Elijah and Elisha stood on its banks. And Elijah took his mantle, and wrapped it together, and smote the waters, and they were divided; so that they two went over on dry ground.

When they were gone over, and stood on the eastern bank of the river, Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee." And Elisha said, "I pray thee, let a double portion

of thy spirit be upon me." Elijah answered, "Thou hast asked a hard thing; but if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so; but if not, it shall not be so." And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw it, and he lamented, saying, "My father, my father! the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof;" meaning, that Elijah, by his prayers, and instructions, and good example, had done more to protect and defend his country than horsemen or chariots of war could do. Elisha saw

him no more ; and as an expression of his sorrow, he took hold of his own clothes, and rent them in two pieces.

The mantle of Elijah had fallen from him as he ascended into heaven. Elisha took it up, and kept it as a token that he was to be the successor of Elijah, and that a double portion of Elijah's spirit was to rest upon him. He went back, and stood by the side of Jordan. And he took the mantle of Elijah, and smote the waters, and said, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" And when he had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither ; and Elisha went over.

And when the fifty young pro-

phets, who stood on the western side of the river, saw him, they said, "The spirit of Elijah doth rest upon Elisha." And they came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him. They did this to show that since Elijah was gone, they would render respect and obedience to Elisha as the head of the seminaries of the prophets. And they said unto Elisha, "Behold, now there be with thy servants fifty strong men; let them go, we pray thee, and seek thy master; lest peradventure the Spirit of the Lord hath taken him up, and cast him upon some mountain, or into some valley." And he said, "Ye shall not send." And when they urged

him till he was ashamed, he suffered them to go, that they might be convinced that Elijah had indeed gone up into heaven. They sent fifty men, while Elisha remained at Jericho. They went, and sought three days in the neighbourhood of Mount Nebo, and at last returned satisfied that Elijah was really gone. And Elisha said unto them, "Did I not say unto you, go not?"

MORE than nine hundred years had passed since Elijah went up in a fiery chariot to heaven. During that long period many changes had taken place among his countrymen. The family of Ahab and Jezebel had been destroyed. The kingdom

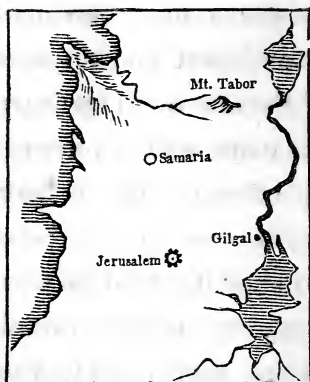
of Israel had been conquered by the Assyrians, and that of Judah by the Babylonians. Jerusalem and the temple had been burned, and all the cities of Israel laid waste. The Jews and Israelites had been made slaves, and carried by their conquerors to the banks of the river Euphrates. After a long and weary captivity they were restored, and permitted to rebuild their temple and ruined cities. Again they planted vineyards among the hills of Judah, and gathered in their harvests on the plain of Jezreel.

All this time, Elijah had been living in heaven. He had been dwelling in the presence of God, and in the company of angels and

glorified spirits. No wicked Ahab or Jezebel was there to disturb his peace, or endanger his life. He had now a rich reward for all his toils and fastings on earth. He had entered into rest. The God of Israel, for whose honour he had been so anxious among his idolatrous countrymen, had put on his head a glorious crown. But he must once more descend upon the mountains of Israel, over which he had wandered in his earthly pilgrimage.

You know that when Jesus, the Son of God, the long-promised Saviour, made his appearance in the world, he was announced by John the Baptist, who came in the spirit and power of Elijah, and like that

prophet wore a hairy garment, and lived in the desert, and preached the terrors of the law to all transgressors. But Jesus came with a voice of peace and love, offering life and salvation to those who repent, and believe on him; and showing that he was truly the Christ, by many miracles of kindness and mercy. The time was drawing near when he would go from Galilee to Jerusalem, there to die upon the cross, that God might justly pardon the sins of men. He took Peter, and James, and John, and went up into a high mountain to pray. Many suppose it was Mount Tabor, on the plain of Esdraelon. While he prayed, his face shone like the sun, and his raiment



was white as the light. Two heavenly visitors came and talked with him. One of them was Moses, the lawgiver of Israel, and the other was Elijah, one of the chief interpreters of the law. Elijah did not appear with a garment of sackcloth, and a leathern girdle, and a countenance pale with fatigue and fasting, as he did when he lived upon earth.

No. He appeared in glory, like an inhabitant of heaven, and a companion of the angels. Moses and Elijah conversed with Jesus upon his death, which was soon to take place at Jerusalem.

The Bible does not tell us why Moses and Elijah were chosen for this service. It would have been thought an honour by Gabriel, or any of the mighty archangels that surround the throne of Jehovah, to be sent on such an errand. But Moses and Elijah had been eminent reformers and servants of God on earth, and they had endured many sufferings for the good of their fellow-men. They knew what it was to make sacrifices for others, and

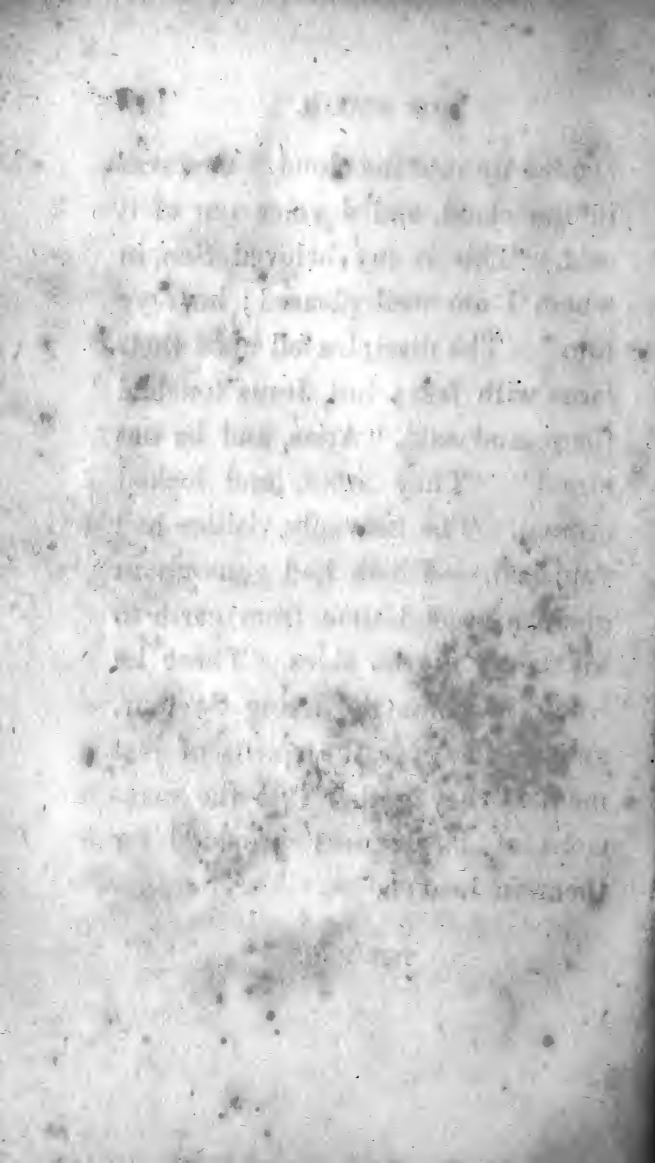
perhaps they were selected partly on this account to converse with the Son of God, and comfort him, in view of his expected death, for the sins of the world.

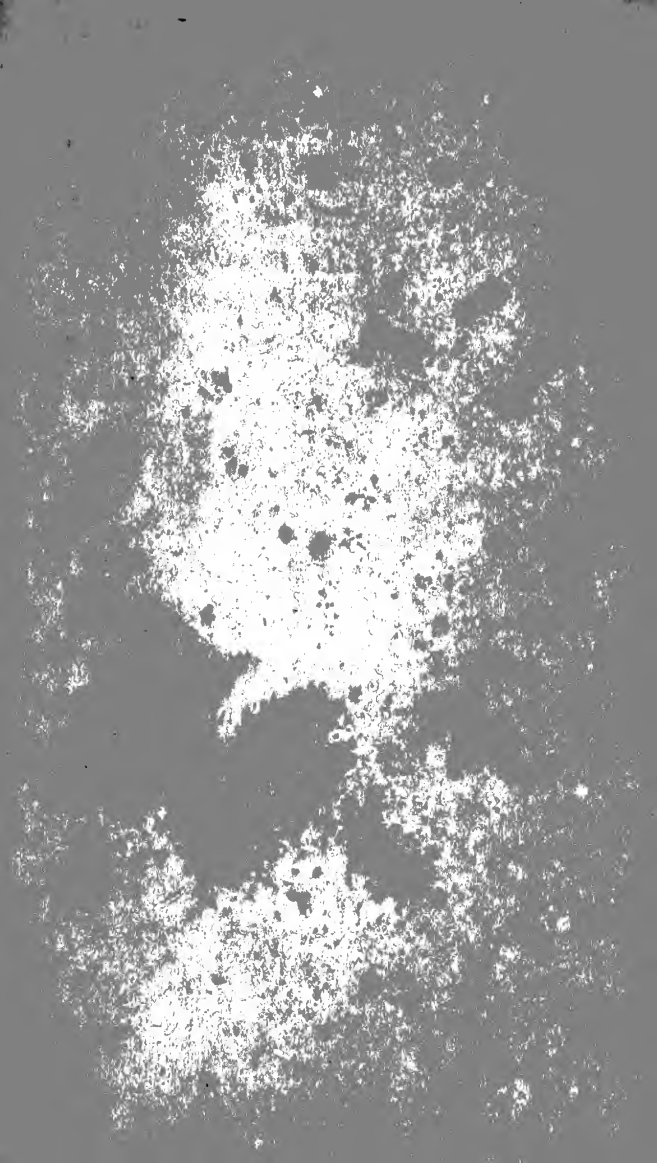
The three disciples were overpowered, and their eyes were heavy with sleep. But when they awoke, Peter, delighted with the glory that surrounded his Master and the two heavenly beings who stood with him, said, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if thou wilt, let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias, or Elijah."

As he spoke, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and Moses and Elijah parted from them, and as-

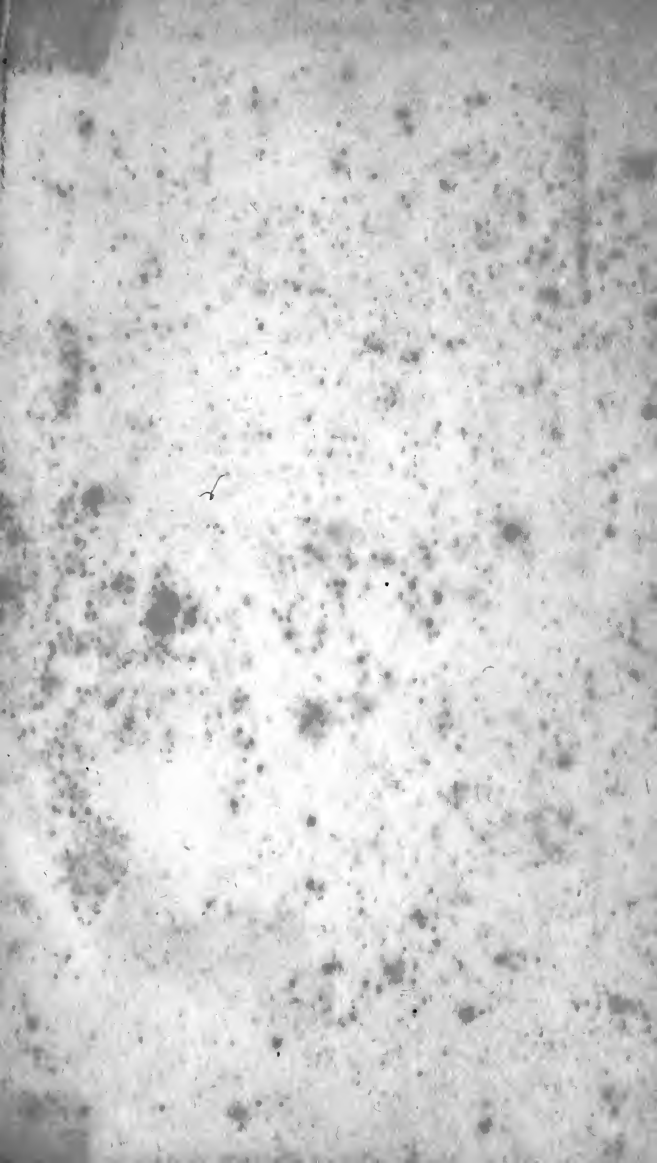
cended up into the cloud. God was in the cloud, and a voice out of it said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him." The disciples fell upon their faces with fear; but Jesus touched them, and said, "Arise, and be not afraid." They arose, and looked around. The heavenly visitors had vanished, — Elijah had gone up in glory, a second time, from earth to his home in the skies. There he would welcome the rising Saviour, and rejoice over the spirits of just men, as they gather into the mansions of blessedness prepared for them in heaven.

THE END.









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